

Elections, Electoral Processes and Women Empowerment in the New Millennium

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Introduction

Elections are the means through which citizens of a specific country choose their political leaders. According to Nohlen (1996), "... elections are a source of legitimacy for the political system; they provide means through which citizens participate in the governing exercise and hence form a basis for the functioning of a liberal democracy" (quoted in Meena, 1999:273). Therefore, to enhance democracy, there is need to create an enabling environment so that all citizens are given an equal opportunity to participate in elections and electoral processes.

In this article, electoral processes have been given a restricted definition as those activities associated with the running of elections. These include registration of political parties to contest elections; identification of election constituencies; nomination of parliamentary and presidential candidates; appointment of electoral administrators, officers, and assistants; voter registration and education; election campaigning; the voting process and final announcements of the election results. In most countries, an institution known as the Electoral Commission facilitates elections and electoral processes. Such a commission is charged with the responsibility of managing the whole electoral process, ensuring that it is carried out in accordance with the law of the land, and that the actual elections are conducted in a free and fair manner.

Electoral systems are mechanisms put in place by different countries to guide the conduct of elections and electoral processes. These mechanisms include electoral laws, guidelines, rules and regulations that govern the conduct of all participants in electoral processes. Electoral systems and processes are part and parcel of political systems.

In a democratic political system, it is expected that all citizens are given an equal opportunity to participate in elections and electoral processes as voters, candidates, or electoral administrators.

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However, gender analysis of elections and electoral processes has shown low levels of women participation. As such, gender specialists, political and social researchers have been conducting studies to investigate the problem so as to suggest concrete and appropriate strategies to empower women politically, and thus enable them participate equally in political processes, including elections and electoral politics.

Women empowerment is a process that ensures that women exercise sufficient control so that they are treated equally. Therefore, women empowerment is a process that mobilizes women to understand gender inequalities, improve their status in society, gain access to resources, participate in decision-making, and ultimately to exercise control of power resources (TAMWA & UNICEF, 1995). Political empowerment is the process of empowering citizens to take an active role in a country's political system. Empowering women politically means enabling them to understand gender inequalities in political processes. It also assists them improve their status, to gain access to political resources that are necessary for active and effective participation, and exercise control in political processes. According to Meena (1997:278) "... political resources include financial, material, experience, political networks, individual social status, and individual power to convince and influence people's opinion."

Women empowerment is one of the interventionist strategies in the process of transforming patriarchal ideologies that tend to perpetuate gender imbalances, and influence the way women participate in public domain activities. In most African societies, patriarchy, cultural norms, values and attitudes that shape social relations influence the image of women and their participation and contribution in social, economic, and political life. Patriarchal relations lead to inequitable access to societal resources, thus enabling male members of the community to have a competitive edge over women in terms of participation in the activities in the public domain, including participation as contestants in electoral politics.

Unlike bourgeois theorists of the 18th and 19th century Europe, who justified the patterns of unequal relations between men and women by stressing the rights of men to dominate the public domain activities, liberal feminists argue that modes of inequalities between men and women have been constructed by society; and that they need to be transformed through a variety of strategies including empowerment of women legally, economically, and politically.

This article analyses issues related to elections, electoral processes, and women empowerment in the new millennium. It reviews observed patterns of women participation in elections and electoral processes in several African countries, and discusses barriers to effective women participation in electoral politics. It also presents and assesses efforts and strategies undertaken to improve levels of women participation in political processes. This will enable us chart out strategies for the future as women prepare to take up the challenges of the new millennium.

The Position of Women in Elections and Electoral Processes: Lessons and Experiences from Selected African Countries

Women as Voters

Experiences from several countries indicate that in general women are considered to be participating effectively in the electoral processes as voters. Women utilize the opportunity provided by elections to exercise their power directly by voting rather than stand for elective positions. This is explained by the fact that the majority of them lack access to political resources that are necessary to enable them engage directly in competitive politics in the public domain. The apparent inequalities in direct participation in electoral politics lead to limited avenues for women. In such a situation, the majority of women have no option but to exercise power directly by voting for leaders, or indirectly by influencing male relatives to influence policy (O'Barr, 1989). Women can also use their voting power to vote effectively to suit their needs, or abstain from the exercise to protest.

In the 1995 Tanzania general elections, there were observed variations in the patterns of voter registration for both gender groups at national, regional, and constituency levels. In some areas women voters far exceeded male voters. For instance, in Kigoma Region, the proportion of women to men voters was 54-46% (TEMCO Report, 1997:55). Mwanza and Mbeya regions had the lowest number of registered women voters. In both cases, women voters accounted for only 43% of the registered voters. In the 2000 elections, there was a slight drop in the number of women voters. The proportion of women voters ranged between 40.06% and 52.65%. Two reasons are attributed to this pattern of women voter behaviour: apathy among voters coupled with the time lag between electoral processes; and the occurrence of violence, harassment and intimidation in some areas (Kiondo & Mosha, 2000). Apathy among voters—and especially women voters—is slowly setting in, as voters feel that

there is nothing to gain by engaging in voting. This confirms O'Barr's views (1984) that patterns of non-voting among women can be observed if the state fails to deliver, or if the system loses its legitimacy. In reviewing women participation in electoral processes, it is important to observe critically this trend, and suggest appropriate measures to counteract it.

Women as Electoral Candidates

In many countries—both in developed and developing—very few women come forward as electoral candidates. As a result, very few get a chance to be elected in positions of power in decision-making bodies of political parties and of governments. This section presents the situation in various selected countries to indicate the extent of the problem.

As far as women aspirants and candidates are concerned, data collected from the 1995 Tanzania elections, the 1999 Malawi elections, as well as those from other countries in the region indicate that as we enter the new millennium, women are still marginalized in electoral politics. In the 1990 single-party elections in Tanzania, only two women were nominated to compete for parliamentary seats from the constituencies. Of the two, only one won after a tough competition from her male contender. In the 1995 multiparty elections, in which thirteen political parties participated, the number of women contesting for seats from the constituencies increased dramatically to 67, or 5% of all parliamentary candidates. Of the 67 women contestants, seven came from CCM, the ruling party, and 60 from the other opposition parties.

While all seven women contestants from CCM won the parliamentary seats in the 1995 Tanzania multiparty elections, only one from opposition parties won a parliamentary seat. There was a negligible increase in the number of women contestants in the 2000 elections. A total of 70 women contested for parliamentary seats compared to the number of men, which was 862. Of these, only 12 women won the elections. A similar trend was observed in the 1999 Malawi elections whereby a total of 59 women, representing 8.8% of all parliamentary candidates, contested in the elections. Of these, only 13 women won their parliamentary seats (Patel, 1999:28).

The electoral experience in Swaziland indicates vividly the disadvantaged position of women in electoral processes. In the 1998 Swazi elections, there were 600 women nominated to stand for elections. After the primary stage, only 100 women went through the screening process. After the elections, only two won

parliamentary seats (Masuku, 1999:33). In the 1992 Zambian local government elections, 88 women were nominated to stand for the elections and only 26 of were elected as against 1,274 men. In the subsequent 1998 elections more women (257) were nominated to stand for the elections against 2,954 men. Of these, only 80 were elected as against 1,177 men (Kaela, 1999:7).

In charting out strategies to improve women representation in state and party organs, women, women groups, and women advocates and lobbyists can learn a lot from the apparent situation observed in national elections of different countries as reviewed in this section.

Women as Election Administrators

The low participation of women in electoral processes is not limited to their participation as contestants, but also as election administrators. In this area, gender disparities have also been observed; with few women at the top of the electoral administrative machinery, and many at the bottom. This situation is also observed in other social, economic, and political spheres, where the participation of women is concentrated at lower levels, creating a pyramid-like structure with few women at the top and many at the bottom.

Gender analysis of election administrators in Tanzania indicates that at the apex of the pyramid there is the National Electoral Commission (NEC). With the exception of one, all the commissioners in the NEC are men. This situation creates a pattern that is observed in most countries around the world. The situation in some selected countries is indicated in Table 1. The table shows clearly the gender disparity in the appointment of electoral commissioners.

Table 1: Gender Composition of Electoral Commissions of Selected Countries

Country	No of Electoral Commissioners	Male	Female
Tanzania	7	6	1
Malawi	9	7	2
Mozambique	9	7	2
Zambia	4	2	2
Namibia	5	4	1
Zimbabwe	5	4	1
Total	39	30	9

Source: Kiondo (1999); Kaela (1999); Totemeyer (1999); and Sachikonye (1999).

In almost all the selected countries, the commissioners are appointees of the president. On the one hand, the appointment of one or two women commissioners in NEC seems to be a defensive mechanism against allegations of gender discrimination. On the other hand, it has become a fashion nowadays to include at least one woman in order to gain the confidence of women rights activists. While this can be viewed as lip service to efforts of gender activists, it can also be taken as one step in the right direction.

It has also been noted that the recruitment of other electoral officers is biased against women: electoral officers at regional, district, constituency, and polling station levels are predominantly men. For instance, at the next level of the electoral administration hierarchy in Tanzania, all the Regional Election Coordinators, except one, are men. At the following level, there are about 182 Returning Officers, and of these, only 6 (or 3.0%) are women. One sees a lot of women at the lower levels of voting supervisors and voter registration clerks (Meena, 1997:278).

The same pattern has been observed in the 1999 elections in Malawi. In Mauritius, the appointment of exclusively male senior election officers is justified by classifying these positions as 'high risk' (Dahoo, 1999:15). The reasons put forward are that people appointed to these positions are exposed to physical 'risks'. These include travelling at odd hours on polling days (very early in the morning and late at night after vote counting). As such, the argument runs, women officers may be exposed to public turmoil. Such officers may also be required to ensure preservation of law and order at polling stations, by controlling movements of candidates, agents and other voters who may become violent in the process. They may also be required to take on-the-spot decisions, sometimes under public pressure, and this may include facing riots or violence (Dahoo 1999:16). However, the appointment of junior election officers is done irrespective of gender. The irony of the matter is that there is one position of 'lady clerk' reserved exclusively for women. This 'lady clerk' is responsible for the ballot box, and ascertaining that every voter puts his/her ballot paper into the ballot box after voting, and before quitting the voting room. One wonders if she is not equally exposed to the 'physical risks' of senior 'lady officials'! According to Dahoo (1999:16) this process ensures the presence of at least one woman among the four officers assigned to a polling station.

From the above discussion of observed patterns of recruitment of electoral officers, it is clear that there is a big anomaly in the exercise that discriminates against women. The exercise of recruiting electoral officers without due regard to gender marginalizes the participation of women in electoral processes. This is an administration problem which can be rectified through appropriate recruitment rules and procedures.

Women in Election Campaigns

Election campaigns are the means through which election candidates present themselves to the electorates. This involves marketing their leadership qualities, and their party policies. Through campaigns, candidates not only strengthen their own political abilities but also those of the parties they represent by attracting new party supporters and voters. Campaigns are processes that involve the use of numerous tactics. These entail commitment of time and financial resources, and strong support from the party, the press and other actors.

That women parliamentary candidates are disadvantaged as far as election campaigns are concerned has been a conclusion reached by several studies exploring the position of women in electoral politics (Nzomo, 1989; Kiondo, 1994; Meena, 1997). Several reasons have been given to explain the observed patterns of behaviour. One of these is the lack of adequate resources on the part of women candidates. It has been noted that due to their position in the social and economic structure, most women candidates lack not only the required political resources to carry out effective campaigns, but also support from their male-dominated political parties. There is a general tendency among male party leaders to reject women aspirants, dismissing them as unelectable, thus making it very difficult for them to go through the preliminary screening, and during the nomination process. In the 1995 elections, for instance, Meena (1997:282) noted that "... most of the political parties did not support women candidates, and even when the latter were nominated, they were not supported to go through the screening, campaigns and elections." A similar observation was made in the 1990 elections whereby a female candidate had to face negative remarks made by her male colleagues who did not support her candidature (Kiondo, 1994:186).

In addition, during the campaign process women candidates are constrained by traditional and socially constructed moral conduct of women. This limits their active participation in informal campaigns taking place at 'socially unacceptable' places and times.

Women's social reproductive roles also limit the time they may invest in political activities, inevitably leading to limited time committed in strategising for campaigns. As a result, very few women manage to participate effectively in competitive politics.

The above constraints affect women candidates competing for elective posts under both single and multiparty systems. However, new trends are observed in electoral politics under multiparty systems whereby women's effective participation is dependent on several factors. These include the phase of the campaign, and the (woman) candidate's party. The nomination phase, which involves women competing within their party, presents a lot of problems. In the stage after the nomination process, women candidates may enjoy all the support of their parties (Kiondo & Moshia, 2000). These patterns were observed among parties with long experiences and financial strength such as CCM. In the other parties, competition from within was either non-existent or less rigorous as women and other contestants lacked both moral and financial support from their parties. It is important that these emerging trends are critically examined in an effort to empower women to participate actively in electoral politics.

Barriers to Women Participation in Elections and Electoral Processes

In general there are several barriers to effective women participation in election and electoral processes. These include, among others:

- ◆ Socio-economic norms and patterns that relegate women to non-public roles
- ◆ Lack of rigorous gender sensitive voter education
- ◆ Lack of adequate resources, including financial and human resource capacity
- ◆ Lack of time and space to strategise for official campaigns and informal campaigns in informal forums
- ◆ Inadequate gender sensitisation of key role-players in the political arena
- ◆ Inadequate and uncoordinated efforts by women and women groups to render support to qualified women aspirants and candidates.

These barriers emanate from socially constructed unequal social relations and the institutionalisation of laws, rules and regulations that govern the activities of the private domain. It is these unequal relations and discriminative laws that gender activists are working hard to transform by drawing programmes of gender sensitising society and empowering women.

Strategies to Improve Women Participation in Elections and Electoral Processes

The disadvantaged position of women in elections and electoral processes has attracted the attention of academics, researchers, gender activists, progressive parties, the government, NGOs, and civil society at large. Researchers and academics have conducted researches and have documented the extent of the problem, and made several recommendations for action. The civil society—especially women groups and NGOs—have been acting as pressure groups to influence the government to take positive action to improve the situation of women not only in politics, elections and electoral processes, but also in other areas of socio-economic concern. Both the government and these organizations have devised strategies directed at improving the situation of women in politics. This section will present a critical analysis of how these strategies have fared over the years.

Electoral Laws, Rules, Regulations and Procedures

Electoral laws in many countries emphasize the need for free and equal participation of all members of society in elections and electoral processes. For instance, in Tanzania, the Union Constitution guarantees the rights of citizens to participate equally in societal affairs, including elections. In addition, the 1977 Constitution, Section 66(1)b provides for 15 percent of the total constituency seats to be reserved for women. Rules, regulations, and procedures for nominating and electing women to occupy the reserved seats under the multiparty electoral system are provided for in Act No. 15 of 1994, Section 13 (Liviga, 1997:74).

The laws, rules, and regulations have been formulated to guarantee equal participation of all citizens in societal affairs. Observed patterns of unequal participation of women in the elective organs of government led to the formulation of additional laws to ensure that women are also represented.

Special Seats for Women

In view of the marginal representation of women in parliament, the government of Tanzania has taken deliberate efforts to increase women representation by reserving a thirty percentage of parliamentary seats to women. During the one-party system, special seats were reserved for representatives of the various organizations

affiliated to the ruling party such as the youth, women, cooperatives, workers, and parents associations. Ten, and later fifteen seats were reserved for each of these organizations. In 1992, before the introduction of the multiparty system, the Nyalali Commission recommended that 15 percent and 25 percent of the seats be reserved for women in parliament and local government respectively. This is what was implemented after the 1995 general elections. In the second multiparty elections, the law was further amended to allow for 20 and 30 percent of the parliamentary and local government councils seats respectively to be allocated to women. The system used was that of proportional representation, i.e., according to the number of seats each party won in the elections. These positive interventions on the part of the government have had an impact on the number of women representatives in parliament. The number of women in parliament has increased from 15 in 1990, to 36 in 1995, and 47 in 2000.

The allocation of special seats to women in parliament has been regarded as a temporary remedy directed at minimizing the apparent gender imbalance in the parliament. However, since its introduction in Tanzania, this feature has dominated much of the politics of the second half of the 20th century. Although the last decade witnessed increased women participation in the political arena, the situation indicates that African societies still have a long way to go to attain a social environment that allows for equal participation of both men and women. As such, the reasons for the introduction and implementation of special seats arrangement for women members of parliament are still valid in the new millennium.

Lobbying and Advocacy Programs

Women and women groups have been lobbying governments to improve the appointment of women in different leadership positions. These women activist groups have been lobbying for change, including improving women's participation in leadership positions. In Tanzania, the Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA), Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP), and other NGOs have been very active and instrumental in this regard. In Zambia, the National Women Lobby Group (NWLG) has been playing a leading role in monitoring gender issues in elections, lobbying the government, and strategising for change. For instance, NWLG and four other NGOs have been managing the Women Campaign Support

Fund set up to assist women candidates (Kaela, 1999:7). These organizations have also held capacity building and gender sensitisation seminars and workshops to build the capacity for women to participate fully in elections and electoral processes; and to sensitise decision-makers, politicians and the public on the problem of gender disparities in elections, election processes, and other areas of concern.

Lobbying and advocacy programs have to some extent made an impact in encouraging women to participate in election and electoral processes. For instance, in the general elections in Tanzania, the number of female members of parliament increased from 27 (11 percent) in 1990 to 45 (16 percent) in 1995, and 60 (23 percent) in 2000. The number of women aspiring for and winning parliamentary seats through regular competition in the parliament also increased from 2 in 1990 to 8 in 1995, and 12 in 2000.

Gender Sensitisation Seminars and Workshops

Seminars have been conducted to sensitise decision-makers and planners to integrate gender issues in various policies and plans to improve gender balance. The Ministry of Community Development, Women and Children, through its Training Fund for Tanzanian Women (TFTW), for example, conducted a training workshop for women members of parliament. The objectives of the training workshop were to train women on various campaign strategies to win seats through constituencies; how to effectively execute their duties as people's representatives; gender issues and qualities of a member of parliament. Issues discussed in the workshop included the various obstacles facing women in the quest for electoral positions in political parties and the government, and how to acquire political resources and influence. The TGNP also conducted training workshops for women aspirants of the 2000 elections. Women aspirants were trained in critical aspects of aspiring and conducting successful campaigns. On the other hand, gender sensitisation seminars directed at politicians and decision-makers have been done to educate them on the importance of integrating gender issues in policies, projects, and programs.

Voter Education Programs

Voter education is important to ensure that voters make the right decisions on the voting day. Although voter education programs

are conducted by various organizations, it has been difficult to effectively reach women voters due to various reasons such as: the language used, timing of voter education program, and limited time of women voters to listen to radio programs or read newspapers. In consideration of the above factors, some NGOs have designed voter education programs specifically directed to women voters. These programs have been instrumental in mobilizing women to vote intelligently, and have in some cases increased voting among women electorates, and the election of women candidates. For instance, in Tanzania, voter education programs in Kigoma region ensured a high rate of participation of women in electoral politics as voters. Data indicate that in Kigoma urban constituency, 55 percent of registered voters were women (Meena 1997:279). In South Africa and Uganda, such programs have ensured steady election of women candidates into the political system.

Evaluation of Strategies to Improve Women Position in Electoral Processes

Although several efforts have been undertaken and strategies adopted to increase women capacity to effectively participate at all levels of the political process, some levels of success have been registered only in some quarters. It has been observed that in countries such as Tanzania, Uganda, and South Africa where deliberate efforts have been taken to implement a variety of strategies, women's capacities to participate in elections have been greatly improved. These strategies range from affirmative action programs, intensive gender lobbying and advocacy programs, gender sensitisation seminars, and voter education to programs that support women candidates. However, in most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, efforts to promote the participation of women in elections and electoral processes at all levels have registered a minimal success. There are some structural weaknesses in these efforts as discussed below.

First, although electoral laws, rules and procedures guarantee equal participation of citizens in the electoral process, there are no mechanisms to ensure that these are implemented at the practical levels. In most cases, there is a lack of mechanisms as most of the procedures for nominating electoral candidates do not take into consideration the special needs and condition of women. For instance, in the 1990 election in Tanzania, it was observed that the

long and arduous process of aspiring for parliamentary seats was not conducive to women participation (Kiondo, 1995). In addition the management of elections and electoral processes is not guided by any gender policy. This is reflected in observed disparities in the appointment of Electoral Commissioners, Regional Election Coordinators, and Returning Officers.

When TGNP undertook a thorough review of some of the electoral laws in 2000, it identified several weaknesses that may contribute to unsatisfactory participation of women in electoral processes. First, the language of the law is biased. Secondly, the law does not include provisions that will ensure gender balance of electoral officials, nor does it protect candidates from sexual harassment, or character assassination. Third, there are no provisions to ensure gender sensitive voter education programs. On the other hand, the laws include a provision for candidates to deposit a large sum of money, a condition that may nullify the rights of some eligible men and women to contest.

In addition, although special seats for women in the parliament have increased the proportion of women in parliament, the system has negative consequences as far as women political empowerment is concerned. Meena (1997:271-277) identifies the following consequences:

- (i) The erosion of competitive skills of women in electoral politics as more women seek to enter parliament through this system
- (ii) A lack of a sense of accountability among women who win parliamentary seats through the system
- (iii) In most cases eligibility for nomination is confined to a few women members from women wings of political parties contesting for elections
- (iv) There are constraints on the part of women parliamentarians to challenge the primacy of male power in parliament since these are the ones who voted for them
- (v) The tendency among women parliamentarians to maintain for long the seats they won through the system.

It is therefore important that the negative consequences of reserved seats for women in the parliament be viewed critically with a view of formulating positive strategies for the new millennium.

Furthermore, lobbying, advocacy, and gender sensitisation programs have made a positive impact in empowering women in electoral politics, and in sensitising policy and decision-makers in the ruling party and government. As a result, gender policies have been integrated in some programs and projects, and more people are now aware of the centrality of women empowerment in all spheres of life, including politics.

Gender sensitisation and mobilisation have to some extent also encouraged more women to participate in elections and electoral processes as observed in the 1995 and 2000 elections in Tanzania. The only problem is that, lobbying, advocacy, and gender sensitisation programs are mainly directed to decision and policy makers at national levels, while most key players at grassroots, the community and the village levels lack the education and information that will sensitise them on gender issues.

Lastly, voter education programs have been instrumental in mobilizing and empowering women to use their voting power intelligently. However, in most cases voter education programs are isolated, face the problem of funding and non-coordination among the various stakeholders. Since many organizations are involved in voter education, it is difficult to determine the quality and content of voter education materials and packages that may include gender stereotyping (Kiondo & Moshia, 2000).

Elections, Electoral Processes and Women Empowerment: The Way Ahead for the Future

For women to participate effectively in election and electoral processes in the new millennium, it is important that strategies be directed at empowering women politically, and transforming the socio-economic and political system that is responsible for the observed patterns of gender inequalities. Strategies should include mainstreaming gender in politics, education, and employment at household level, in business, and in the professions to achieve a gender balance; and thus create opportunities for both men and women to gain equal access to political resources.

Theoretically, women empowerment in the political arena suggests the creation of an environment that provides women with a space to be active in politics. A conducive political environment implies

that both gender groups have equal access to political resources. Women's acquisition of political resources includes the assumption that:

- (a) Societal attitudes towards the role of women in the public domain have changed dramatically.
- (b) Women have assumed economic power, and have alleviated poverty.
- (c) Women have equal access to education and employment opportunities.
- (d) A country has a non-discriminatory socialisation process, and that the society is gender sensitive.
- (e) Traditional barriers militating against women's active political participation have been eliminated.

In order to empower women effectively in elections and election processes in the new millennium, women, women groups, governments, and the inter-national community should work together to achieve the above in the long run. It is hoped that if room for implementation of comprehensive strategies is provided, then some positive patterns of change should be observed in the new millennium.

This article recommends the adoption and intensification of the following strategies. To start with, efforts should be directed at transforming social economic relations that perpetuate the subordinate position of women in the society. Areas that need attention include, among others, the educational system, socialisation process, and economic empowerment to alleviate poverty. It is important that strategies to alleviate poverty among men and women be strengthened to empower women economically since this is one important step towards the acquisition of political power. With economic power, women will gain confidence in executing political activities and influencing public opinion, including that of decision-makers and potential voters.

It is recommended that strategies should also be directed at ensuring equal educational opportunities to both gender groups. Equal access to educational opportunities, including higher education, is important for women to get access to employment and business opportunities that could be directly linked to political resources central to active participation in electoral politics. It is further recommended, as a long-term strategy, to sensitise communities to the right information to enable them make informed decisions, and to take appropriate actions during the entire electoral process.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the problem of gender imbalance in elections and electoral processes. Experiences from different countries, especially those in SSA, have been surveyed to indicate the extent of the problem. It has argued that the main reasons for the observed inequalities in elections and electoral processes are the constructed social patterns of behaviour that accord women inferior positions to men. These patterns of behaviour lead to unequal power relations and unequal access to societal resources between the gender groups.

Strategies adopted by governments, NGOs and other stakeholders to improve the position of women in election and electoral politics have been discussed and evaluated to come up with a concrete cause of action to be considered for implementation in the new millennium.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that women empowerment in politics in general, and elections and electoral processes in particular, is a process. It is a process that constitutes several interdependent elements identified and discussed in this article. Going through the process engenders an active struggle by women, women activists, and a gender sensitised civil society. The struggle to empower women for equal and effective participation in elections and electoral processes may be long and arduous, but it is important that the struggle be intensified in all fronts.

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Gender and the 2000 Elections in Tanzania: Participation, Mobilization and Performance of Women

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Introduction

Gender equality is part and parcel of a democratic society. One cannot claim to be democratic or democratizing if gender equality is not a part of the democratization initiative.

The issue of citizen participation (including participation in electoral politics) in Tanzania has received attention from both domestic statutory provisions, and international organs in the endeavour to promote human rights. Tanzania is a party to most of these regional and international instruments. A few examples cited below indicate Tanzania's commitment to guarantee equality to all of its citizens.

The constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania 1977, as amended several times, provides for the right of participation of all adult citizens in electoral politics. The Bill of Rights was enshrined in the constitution in 1984. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified in 1979 and came into force in 1981, makes an unequivocal call to member states when it mandates that:

Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political life and shall ensure to women on equal term with men, the right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government. (CEDAW, 1979)

Likewise, the issue of gender equality is part of the Beijing platform for action in which a specific call was made to countries that participated in the Beijing Women Conference in 1995. The call stipulates that:

Governments should take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making by creating a gender balance in government and administration by integrating women into political parties,

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